

## Recreation and Fitness Workers

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### Significant Points

- Educational requirements for recreation workers range from a high school diploma to a graduate degree, whereas fitness workers usually need certification.
- Competition will remain keen for full-time career positions in recreation; however, job prospects for fitness workers will be more favorable.
- The recreation field offers many part-time and seasonal job opportunities.

### Nature of the Work

People spend much of their leisure time participating in a wide variety of organized recreational activities, such as aerobics, arts and crafts, the performing arts, camping, and sports. Recreation and fitness workers plan, organize, and direct these activities in local playgrounds and recreation areas, parks, community centers, health clubs, fitness centers, religious organizations, camps, theme parks, and tourist attractions. Increasingly, recreational and fitness workers also are found in workplaces, where they organize and direct leisure activities and athletic programs for employees of all ages.

Recreation workers hold a variety of positions at different levels of responsibility. *Recreation leaders*, who are responsible for a recreation program's daily operation, primarily organize and direct participants. They may lead and give instruction in dance, drama, crafts, games, and sports; schedule use of facilities; keep records of equipment use; and ensure that recreation facilities and equipment are used properly. Workers who provide instruction and coach groups in specialties such as art, music, drama, swimming, or tennis may be called *activity specialists*. *Recreation supervisors* oversee recreation leaders and plan, organize, and manage recreational activities to meet the needs of a variety of populations. These workers often serve as liaisons between the director of the park or recreation center and the recreation leaders. Recreation supervisors with more specialized responsibilities also may direct special activities or events or oversee a major activity, such as aquatics, gymnastics, or performing arts. *Directors of recreation and parks* develop and manage comprehensive recreation programs in parks, playgrounds, and other settings. Directors usually serve as technical advisors to State and local recreation and park commissions and may be responsible for recreation and park budgets. (Workers in a related occupation, *recreational therapists*, help individuals to recover from or adjust to illness, disability, or specific social problems; this occupation is described elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

*Camp counselors* lead and instruct children and teenagers in outdoor-oriented forms of recreation, such as swimming, hiking, horseback riding, and camping. In addition, counselors provide campers with specialized instruction in subjects such as archery, boating, music, drama, gymnastics, tennis, and computers. In resident camps, counselors also provide guidance and supervise daily living and general socialization. *Camp directors* typically supervise camp counselors, plan camp activities or programs, and perform the various administrative functions of a camp.

Fitness workers instruct or coach groups or individuals in various exercise activities. Because gyms and health clubs offer a variety of exercise activities such as weightlifting, yoga, aerobics, and karate, fitness workers typically specialize in only a few areas. *Fitness trainers* help clients to assess their level of physical fitness and help them to set and reach fitness goals. They also demonstrate various exercises and help clients to improve their exercise techniques. They may keep records of their clients' exercise sessions in order to assess their progress towards physical fitness. *Personal trainers* work with clients on a one-on-one basis in either a gym or the client's home. *Aerobics instructors* conduct group exercise sessions that involve aerobic exercise, stretching, and muscle conditioning. Some fitness workers may perform the duties of both aerobics instructors and fitness trainers. *Fitness directors* oversee the operations of a health club or fitness center. Their work involves creating and maintaining programs that meet the needs of the club's members. (Workers in a related occupation—*athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers*—participate in organized sports; this occupation is described elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

### Working Conditions

Recreation and fitness workers may work in a variety of settings—for example, a health club, cruise ship, woodland recreational park, or playground in the center of a large urban community. Regardless of setting, most recreation workers spend much of their time outdoors and may work in a variety of weather conditions, whereas most fitness workers spend their time indoors at fitness centers and health clubs. Recreation and fitness directors and supervisors, however, typically spend most of their time in an office, planning programs and special events. Directors and supervisors generally engage in less physical activity than do lower level recreation and fitness workers. Nevertheless, recreation and fitness workers at all levels risk suffering injuries during physical activities.

Many recreation and fitness workers work about 40 hours a week. People entering this field, especially camp counselors, should expect some night and weekend work and irregular hours. About 36 percent work part time and many recreation jobs are seasonal.



*Fitness trainers demonstrate various exercises and help clients to improve their exercise techniques.*

## Employment

Recreation and fitness workers held about 485,000 jobs in 2002, and many additional workers held summer jobs in this occupation. About 62 percent were recreation workers; the rest were fitness trainers and aerobics instructors. Of those with year-round jobs as recreation workers, almost 40 percent worked for local governments, primarily in the park and recreation departments. Around 14 percent of recreation workers were employed in civic and social organizations, such as the Boy or Girl Scouts or Red Cross. Another 12 percent of recreation workers were employed by nursing and other personal care facilities.

Almost all fitness trainers and aerobics instructors worked in physical fitness facilities, health clubs, and fitness centers, mainly within the amusement and recreation services industry or civic and social organizations. About 5 percent of fitness workers were self-employed; many of these were personal trainers.

The recreation field has an unusually large number of part-time, seasonal, and volunteer jobs. These jobs include summer camp counselors, craft specialists, and afterschool and weekend recreation program leaders. In addition, many teachers and college students accept jobs as recreation and fitness workers when school is not in session. The vast majority of volunteers serve as activity leaders at local day-camp programs, or in youth organizations, camps, nursing homes, hospitals, senior centers, and other settings.

## Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Educational requirements for recreation workers range from a high school diploma—or sometimes less for many summer jobs—to graduate degrees for some administrative positions in large public recreation systems. Full-time career professional positions usually require a college degree with a major in parks and recreation or leisure studies, but a bachelor's degree in any liberal arts field may be sufficient for some jobs in the private sector. In industrial recreation, or “employee services” as it is more commonly called, companies prefer to hire those with a bachelor's degree in recreation or leisure studies and a background in business administration.

Specialized training or experience in a particular field, such as art, music, drama, or athletics, is an asset for many jobs. Some jobs also require certification. For example, a lifesaving certificate is a prerequisite for teaching or coaching water-related activities. Graduates of associate degree programs in parks and recreation, social work, and other human services disciplines also enter some career recreation positions. High school graduates occasionally enter career positions, but this is not common. Some college students work part time as recreation workers while earning degrees.

A bachelor's degree and experience are preferred for most recreation supervisor jobs and required for higher level administrative jobs. However, an increasing number of recreation workers who aspire to administrative positions obtain master's degrees in parks and recreation or related disciplines. Certification in the recreation field may be helpful for advancement. Also, many persons in other disciplines, including social work, forestry, and resource management, pursue graduate degrees in recreation.

Programs leading to an associate or bachelor's degree in parks and recreation, leisure studies, or related fields are offered at several hundred colleges and universities. Many also offer master's or doctoral degrees in the field. In 2002, 100 bachelor's degree programs in parks and recreation were accredited by the

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Accredited programs provide broad exposure to the history, theory, and practice of park and recreation management. Courses offered include community organization; supervision and administration; recreational needs of special populations, such as the elderly or disabled; and supervised fieldwork. Students may specialize in areas such as therapeutic recreation, park management, outdoor recreation, industrial or commercial recreation, or camp management. Certification in the recreation field is offered by the NRPA National Certification Board. Continuing education is necessary to remain certified.

Generally, fitness trainers and aerobics instructors must obtain a certification in the fitness field to obtain employment. Certification may be offered in various areas of exercise such as personal training, weight training, and aerobics. There are many organizations that offer certification testing in the fitness field, some of which are listed in the Sources of Additional Information section of this statement. Certification generally is good for 2 years, after which workers must become recertified. Recertification is accomplished by attending continuing education classes. Most fitness workers are required to maintain a cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification. Some employers also require workers to be certified in first aid.

An increasing number of employers require fitness workers to have a bachelor's degree in a field related to health or fitness, such as exercise science or physical education. Some employers allow workers to substitute a college degree for certification, while others require both a degree and certification. A bachelor's degree and, in some cases, a master's degree in exercise science, physical education, or a related area, along with experience, usually is required to advance to management positions in a health club or fitness center. Many fitness workers become personal trainers, in addition to their main job in a fitness center, or as a full-time job. Some workers go into business for themselves and open up their own fitness centers.

Persons planning recreation and fitness careers should be outgoing, good at motivating people, and sensitive to the needs of others. Excellent health and physical fitness are required due to the physical nature of the job. Volunteer experience, part-time work during school, or a summer job can lead to a full-time career as a recreation worker. As in many fields, managerial skills are needed to advance to supervisory or managerial positions. College courses in management, business administration, accounting, and personnel management are helpful for advancement to supervisory or managerial jobs.

## Job Outlook

Competition will be keen for career positions as recreation workers because the field attracts many applicants and because the number of career positions is limited compared with the number of lower level seasonal jobs. Opportunities for staff positions should be best for persons with formal training and experience gained in part-time or seasonal recreation jobs. Those with graduate degrees should have the best opportunities for supervisory or administrative positions. Opportunities are expected to be better for fitness trainers and aerobics instructors because of relatively rapid growth in employment. Job openings for both recreation and fitness workers also will stem from the need to replace the large numbers of workers who leave these occupations each year.

Overall employment of recreation and fitness workers is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2012, as an increasing number of people spend more time and

money on recreation, fitness, and leisure services and as more businesses recognize the benefits of recreation and fitness programs and other services such as wellness programs. Average employment growth is projected for recreation workers—reflecting growth in local government and civic and social organizations, industries that employ just over half of all recreation workers. Employment growth among recreation workers may be inhibited, however, by budget constraints that some local governments may face over the 2002-12 projection period. Employment of fitness workers—who are concentrated in the rapidly growing arts, entertainment and recreation industry—is expected to increase much faster than average due to rising interest in personal training, aerobics instruction, and other fitness activities.

The recreation field provides a large number of temporary, seasonal jobs. These positions, which typically are filled by high school or college students, generally do not have formal education requirements and are open to anyone with the desired personal qualities. Employers compete for a share of the vacationing student labor force and, although salaries in recreation often are lower than those in other fields, the nature of the work and the opportunity to work outdoors are attractive to many.

### Earnings

Median hourly earnings of recreation workers who worked full time in 2002 were \$8.69. The middle 50 percent earned between about \$7.09 and \$11.36, while the top 10 percent earned \$15.72 or more. However, earnings of recreation directors and others in supervisory or managerial positions can be substantially higher. Most public and private recreation agencies provide full-time recreation workers with typical benefits; part-time workers receive few, if any, benefits. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of recreation workers in 2002 were:

Nursing care facilities .....	\$9.30
Local government .....	8.98
Individual and family services .....	8.71
Civic and social organizations .....	7.73
Other amusement and recreation industries .....	7.53

Median hourly earnings of fitness trainers and aerobics instructors in 2002 were \$11.51. The middle 50 percent earned between \$8.06 and \$18.18, while the top 10 percent earned \$26.22 or more. Earnings of successful self-employed personal trainers can be much higher. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of recreation workers in 2002 were:

Other amusement and recreation industries .....	\$13.81
Civic and social organizations .....	9.24
Other schools and instruction .....	8.93

### Related Occupations

Recreation workers must exhibit leadership and sensitivity when dealing with people. Other occupations that require similar personal qualities include counselors, probation officers and correctional treatment specialists, psychologists, recreational therapists, and social workers. Occupations that focus on physical fitness, as do fitness workers, include athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers.

### Sources of Additional Information

For information on jobs in recreation, contact employers such as local government departments of parks and recreation, nursing and personal care facilities, the Boy or Girl Scouts, or local social or religious organizations.

For information on careers, certification, and academic programs in parks and recreation, contact:

► National Recreation and Park Association, Division of Professional Services, 22377 Belmont Ridge Rd., Ashburn, VA 20148-4501. Internet: <http://www.nrpa.org>

For career information about camp counselors, contact:

► American Camping Association, 5000 State Road 67 North, Martinsville, IN 46151-7902. Internet: <http://www.acacamps.org>

For information on careers and certification in the fitness field, contact:

► American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Dr., San Diego, CA 92123. Internet: <http://www.acefitness.org>

► National Strength and Conditioning Association, 4575 Galley Rd., Suite 400B, Colorado Springs, CO 80915. Internet: <http://www.nasca-lift.org>

► American College of Sports Medicine, PO Box 1440, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1440. Internet: <http://www.acsm.org>